

The U.S. Dept. of the Interior has capitulated to the pet industry by abandoning its commitment to severely restrict the importation of almost all wild animals intended as pets and replacing it with a proposal that would permit the traffic in wild animals to continue with few restrictions.

Interior officials had proposed regulations in December, 1973, to employ the little-used 1900 Lacey Act to ban the importation of any wild animals that might be injurious to people, other animals, agriculture, or the environment. All but five species of mammals and many fish, reptiles, and birds were listed as potential hazards. The effect of the regulations would have been to severely restrict, if not totally stop, the trade in exotic animals for use as pets.

Under the substitute proposal, the majority of wild animals now being imported for sale as pets would be exempted from restrictions. The exempted animals include most primates, including squirrel monkeys, the most popular exotic animal being sold by the pet industry, spider monkeys, owl monkeys, chimpanzees, apes, and marmosets. Almost all monkeys are carriers of diseases that afflict man. Chimpanzees, for example, are often carriers of hepatitis and tuberculosis. The owl monkey is a carrier of Virus B, a virus with few symptoms in the monkey but fatal to man. All monkeys are carriers of Herpes virus, found in the common cold sore and a potential cause of serious infection in children.

Other exempted species include African and Asian elephants, both black and white rhinoceroses, Nile and pygmy hippopotamuses, some wild cats, including lions, and caymans (a member of the crocodile family commonly sold in the United States as baby alligators). Almost all of these animals pose a threat to the safety of people, domestic animals, and native American wildlife.

"There is absolutely no justification for the inclusion of any of these animals in a list of species that are supposedly safe as pets," declared HSUS President John A. Hoyt. "It is an outrage that the pet industry has been allowed to sabotage a rational proposal that would have protected people, animals, and the environment."

HSUS has been concerned about traffic in wild animals as pets for many years. It is constantly called upon to assist in the removal of wild animals that have become too large or aggressive to remain in private households. Most of these problem animals are un-



Photo by Fred Stevenson
Squirrel monkeys are among the many exotic animals that can be imported for use as pets under the Dept. of the Interior's proposed regulations.

Interior Dilutes Importation Ban On Exotic Pets

Pet Industry Succeeds In Assault on Lacey Act

wanted by zoos, and animal shelters have no facilities for caring for them. The only solution in most cases is euthanasia.

Even more disturbing is the high mortality rate of wild animals caught and sold as pets. Many animals die in the process of being captured, with the parents often being killed in order to capture the offspring. One study found that as many as 60% of the animals caught in the jungle die before reaching the

point of exportation. Many more die in transit to the United States. Even for the animals that survive to become pets, the odds of living beyond the first year are small.

"The original Interior proposal was commendable in that it would have kept exotic animals out of the hands of unqualified people," said Sue Pressman, HSUS director of wildlife protection. "The substitute proposal will accomplish almost nothing to help remedy this situation."

The pet industry mounted a full-scale campaign to defeat the original proposal, including a meeting at the White House with one of President Ford's advisers. Some members of the industry stooped to blatant lies about the nature of the proposal. HSUS members reported seeing signs in pet shops that warned pet owners the new regulations would prohibit the keeping of all pets, including dogs and cats. In actuality, only wild animals being imported from other countries would have been affected.

When the original proposal was made it had the solid backing of Nathaniel P. Reed, assistant Interior secretary for fish, wildlife and parks, who told participants in the 1973 HSUS Annual Conference that he considered wild animal pet dealers "the dregs of society." In that speech Reed made it very clear that he was opposed to the use of any wild animals as pets.

"It is obvious that the world's wildlife is no longer able to sustain the unregulated exploitation to which it has been subjected for so long," Reed said. "We must develop a new ethic, and we must enforce new regulations to end this gruesome business."

But that "new ethic" and those "new regulations" became the victims of commercial pet interests. Although it appears to be too late to salvage the original proposal, it may not be too late to strengthen the substitute one. HSUS urges all members and supporters to write immediately to the Dept. of the Interior to protest the permissiveness of the current proposal.

Let Interior officials know that you are not only concerned with the plight of the animals but with the safety of your family, who, under the new rules, can be exposed to the viruses of a pet chimpanzee or the attack of a pet lion. Write to Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20042. □